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SUBJECT: A/S HILL'S JANUARY 9 MEETING WITH GNP'S PARK
GEUN-HYE

Classified By: Ambassador Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In an upbeat January 9 lunch, former GNP Chairperson Park Geun-hye and EAP A/S Hill discussed the latest developments in North Korea and prospects for the future of U.S.-ROK relations. EAP A/S Hill said he hoped that North Korea would make a complete and correct declaration of its nuclear programs and conclude Phase II of the denuclearization process soon. Park said she expected a Lee Myung-bak presidency would mean better cooperation between the U.S. and the ROK and therefore promote progress in solving the DPRK nuclear problem. Park said she would continue to work from her seat in the National Assembly -- rather than from within the Lee administration, where she is not expected to take a post -- to ensure that relations with the U.S. deepened and that the KORUS FTA passed so that our two countries could build on our strong friendship and alliance. END SUMMARY.

Bright Future

¶2. (C) Former GNP Chairperson Park Geun-hye predicted that with the impending change in government, U.S.-ROK relations would improve. Park said she would work to deepen trust between the U.S. and Korea and build on common values by supporting ratification of the KORUS FTA and the universal values of democracy and human rights. A/S Hill said the DPRK had learned that the U.S. and ROK could not be split. Park agreed that the DPRK had tried hard to drive a wedge between the U.S. and the ROK but had failed. If South Korea handled its foreign policy well and on the basis of a trusting U.S.-ROK relationship, more collaboration on shared strategic principles would be possible. Many issues -- including the DPRK nuclear issue -- could be solved.

North Korea

¶3. (C) A/S Hill said that the U.S. had worked well with Foreign Minister Song Min-soon and the professionals at MOFAT, adding that it had often been difficult to coordinate the Six-Party process with the Ministry of Unification's efforts on the North-South relationship. In the future, it was important to better calibrate North-South exchanges with progress in the Six-Party Talks. Park agreed that when dealing with North Korea, it was important to have aid and economic cooperation as a bargaining chip. If too much was given through the North-South channel, the Six-Party process could become more difficult. This would not be a problem in the Lee Myung-bak administration, Park said.

¶4. (C) Representative Chin Young clarified that humanitarian aid would continue, but that any economic cooperation would be connected to the DPRK's progress toward denuclearization. A/S Hill said that the U.S. had recently held unsuccessful discussions with the DPRK about delivering 500,000 tons of USG food aid to North Korea. The DPRK refused to allow the food to be delivered through the World Food Program (WFP). Park noted that this reflected the sad fact that the regime was willing to withhold food from its own people for political and bureaucratic reasons.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador asked Park what President-elect Lee Myung-bak's policy would be toward North Korea. Park said that Lee would adhere to the GNP's following clear principles: nuclear weapons were unacceptable; international cooperation was needed for the DPRK to denuclearize; and both carrots and sticks should be used in negotiations with North Korea. Representative Chin said that the basic policy goals include "denuclearization, opening, USD 3,000 GDP per capita in 10 years." But denuclearization is a prerequisite for proceeding with the other two, Chin said.

Travel to North Korea

¶6. (C) A/S Hill said he was shocked by what he saw during his two trips to North Korea in June and December 2007. Park said she went to North Korea in 2002 and advised the DPRK that, given the U.S. population's role in selecting the country's leaders, it is important to take positive steps to influence U.S. public opinion. Doing so would reduce the political risks for a president wanting to productively engage with North Korea. This was perhaps a new message for the DPRK, Park said. Ambassador Vershbow observed that

unfortunately the message had not sunk in as the DPRK tended to do the opposite of what would engender good will on the part of the American people.

Declaration State of Play

¶7. (C) Park asked for an update on the status on North Korea's commitment to provide a complete and correct declaration of its nuclear programs. A/S Hill stressed that for the declaration to be complete and correct (and therefore acceptable to the other five parties), it must address uranium enrichment programs as well as North Korea's past nuclear cooperation with other countries. Once North Korea submits a complete and correct declaration and completes disablement, the Six Parties could move to the third phase of denuclearization.

Human Rights

¶8. (C) A/S Hill noted that in the ROK, the progressives did not want to mention North Korean human rights, whereas in the U.S. both liberals and conservatives were equally vocal about the issue. Park agreed, lamenting that the left in South Korea talked about human rights issues only in South Korea but not in North Korea. Hill said it was ironic since the progressives had benefited so much from international pressure to improve human rights conditions in South Korea. Park said that the basic goal was to have the North Korean people enjoy the same freedoms that South Koreans do and, of course, to establish peace on a reunified Peninsula. Park reasoned, however, that North Korea's leaders were likely afraid of too much openness because they feared their regime could not survive an onslaught of outside influences.

Domestic Politics

¶9. (C) The Ambassador asked if there would be a peaceful solution of the internal GNP struggle over the selection of candidates for the April 9 National Assembly elections. Park said that it all depended on the President-elect. The GNP had made many reforms during her tenure as GNP Chairperson from 2004 to 2006; the party had established a more transparent nomination system, and she had given up much of the power that former party Chairmen enjoyed. Therefore, the most important thing was that Lee not reverse the progress the party had made in recent years, because those reforms, after the party had almost disappeared in 2004, had contributed to his electoral victory.

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